

"Transcend the Ordinary"

Cheshvan-Kislev-Tevet-Shevat 5785

December 2024 - February 2025

DISAGREEING *L'SHEM SHAMAYIM*

By RABBI MYCHAL COPELAND



At this contentious time in our communities and the world, we are nearing what was once a very contentious holiday. Chanukah commemorates the victory of the Maccabees over the Greeks, a war that was also an internal conflict between Jewish factions. To underplay this divisiveness, the Sages later remade the holiday into a celebration of light in the dark of winter. They told a story about a small cruse of oil needed to rededicate the desecrated Temple - oil that miraculously lasted eight days, long enough to clean up the defiled sacred space. To remember this miracle, we light the chanukiah. But how to light it?

As usual, the ancient rabbis Hillel and Shammai disagreed. Shammai thought we should start with all the lights fully lit and decrease one each night of the holiday. Hillel thought we should start with one and increase the light each night. Much has been written about why

Hillel won the debate. More interesting, I think, is that these rabbis, and by extension their followers, did not despise each other. They are said to have argued *l'shem shamayim*, for the sake of heaven: with great humility, not to gain honor or to prevail over the other. Hillel always cited Shammai's opinions before his own, and the children of one house married the children of the other. The two scholars are said to be models of how to disagree. Their debate about how to light the chanukiah counters the internal fighting that is the origin story of this very holiday.

Many of us are feeling ruptures in our communities, families, and friendship circles, especially during this holiday season. If Hillel and Shammai were around, I imagine they would urge us to argue *l'shem shamayim*, or perhaps tell us not to disengage. But that might be hard for us right now. The 18th century Rabbi Eybeschuetz wrote of the Jewish mandate to love your neighbor: "not all neighbors are loveable. There are those who ... have done you harm." He continues in the voice of Torah: "I do not, therefore, command you to live as if you were angels, without any of the emotions natural to human beings. I do, however, forbid you to hate." We are allowed to be angry. But hate leads to destruction — very rarely of those we oppose, but definitely of ourselves.

Take care of yourself this holiday season. And when you find yourself with friends, family, or co-workers with whom you disagree, if you can't engage *l'shem shamayim*, let the light of the chanukiah remind you of two people who offered us a better model of conflict than the ones we see in our world right now.

**CHEVRA
KADISHA**

pg. 5

By MIKE SHRIVER



It's hard to imagine, but December marks the 12th month of having Rabbi Q (Lisa Levenberg), Rabbi Reuben Zellman, and Danny Shapiro as members of our amazingly talented staff.

In September, I had the great fortune of attending the opening of this year's Beit Seifer program. Sitting in the Oneg room surrounded by parents and so many kids was truly powerful. I love spending time with our future! Under Rabbi Q's leadership, our Beit Seifer is in good hands.

The incredibly talented Rabbi Reuben Zellman is leading our vanguard pilot program, The Welcome Home Project about which I am excited. (Please read Rabbi Zellman's article in this issue of the JGF).

It's been fantastic to witness Danny Shapiro successfully and effectively take the reins

as our Executive Director. To say that Danny is a gift is an understatement. His calming and professional manner is beyond appreciated. We are in such a better position administratively because of him, and for that I am so grateful.

Lastly, I wanted to return to a comment from my drash from High Holy Day services: "Hope moves in the plural." Whether sitting in the Sanctuary during Simchat Torah services, watching congregants and families and kids dancing with the Torah, being on Zoom for SZ's memorial service for the victims of the October 7th massacre, witnessing our community kick-off efforts to pass Prop 3 with a chuppah and a vow renewal ceremony on our bimah, or watching Rabbi Copeland leading yoga on the lawn of the Herbst Theater during Yom Kippur, I felt hope, and I experienced what hope looks like as a congregation and a community.

I look forward to a productive and meaningful 2025 with each and every one of you.

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By DANNY SHAPIRO



Last December I faced a decision: whether to move across the country, to a city I had only visited a handful of times, where I knew virtually nobody, and to take on a new job that was clearly going to be a huge undertaking. It

had only been a few months since the earth-shattering events of October 7, and my personal life was also in a bit of chaos. With so much disorder, was there any amount of analysis that would have been sufficient to adequately evaluate this important decision?

It turned out to be a much easier decision than I had imagined. My visit to Sha'ar Zahav was over Chanukah Shabbat. I witnessed the beauty of our own somewhat disorderly Chanukah festivities, got to know so much about the community, experienced our tefillah, was hosted for lovely meals with lay leaders, and had a chance to explore a bit of San Francisco. It became clear to me that Sha'ar Zahav was the place for me.

As we are approaching Chanukah and I get ready to celebrate my anniversary at Sha'ar Zahav, I am fondly recalling my journey here. Serving Sha'ar Zahav and this community is my calling, and I feel like I've arrived home at 290 Dolores Street and in the larger San Francisco community. I'm so grateful to be here, and even more impressed by the generosity of the members that sustain our amazing home.

In a few weeks, as we celebrate the miracles of Chanukah and the rededication of the Temple in Jerusalem, we can also take a moment to celebrate our own holy space and the endless miracles since Sha'ar Zahav's founding. What has been accomplished here through years of efforts from lay leaders, clergy, staff, and members is truly miraculous. We can also recall the events in our lives - both the good and the bad - that led each of us here to find Sha'ar Zahav. Let's give thanks and take pride in all that has been accomplished. Chag Chanukah Sameach!

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CELEBRATING SUKKOT IN DECEMBER?

By RABBI Q

How can I write my article for the December Jewish Gaily Forward when it's only October? I can't think about Chanukah during Sukkot – my favorite holiday. Eight days of backyard camping! A full-moon harvest festival!

It turns out, the Maccabees were also totally into Sukkot. For ancient Jews, the Sukkot pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem was one of the community's most central rites; in fact, it was during Sukkot that Solomon dedicated the First Temple itself, hundreds of years earlier. Thus, when the wicked Antiochus tried to forcibly impose Greek religious practices and stamp out Jewish culture and identity, he banned Shabbat, kashrut, brit milah - and Sukkot.

According to the Second Book of Maccabees, during Tishrei, in what would be the final months of their campaign, the Jewish rebel forces were still hiding out in caves in the Jerusalem hills and were not able to make

the traditional Temple pilgrimage for Sukkot. Naturally, when the Maccabees reclaimed the Temple, they wanted to celebrate! "They celebrated it for eight days with gladness like Sukkot and recalled how a little while before, during Sukkot they had been wandering in the mountains and caverns like wild animals. So carrying lulavs...they offered hymns of praise to God who had brought to pass the purification of God's own place." (II Maccabees 10:6-7)

The ritual they created was both a "make-up" for the missed holiday and a harkening back to King Solomon's original dedication of the first Temple. Today, people are more familiar with Chanukah than Sukkot – but now you know that there's a fall festival hidden inside our winter Festival of Lights!

For more, check out *A Different Light: The Big Book of Hanukkah*, by Noam Zion and Barbara Spectre.

SHA'AR ZAHAV MEET THE B'MITZVAH

Yeroham Franco



Yeroham Franco, son of Daliah Ortega and Yehuda Franco, will be called to the Torah as a bar mitzvah on January 25.

Yeroham is a proud little Jewish boy, wearing his *kippa* every day.

He has always been attached to his *payes* (sidelocks), which have been part of his

identity as a Jewish boy. He loves to get compliments about how he probably has the longest *payes* in San Francisco. He is looking forward to his bar mitzvah.

At school, he enjoys studying English because he likes studying the meaning of words. Yeroham likes his name, how it sounds, how it is written and what it means. It means "the city of my people." He also enjoys drawing.

CHEVRA KADISHA

By LISA FINKELSTEIN

Certain things in life are inevitable, with death at the top of the list. It is often hard to talk about, read about, think about, hear about, but the end of life happens to us all. Just as joy informs my choices about being in community, so does death. Feel free to blame intergenerational trauma or my own life experiences, but somehow I got the skills to talk about Jewish rituals around death. So why the upbeat topic? Because in my mind, we as members of Sha'ar Zahav are incredibly lucky: unique among San Francisco synagogues, we have an ongoing, thoughtful, and kind *Chevra Kadisha* team to help us when a community member dies.

First some vocab – the word *chevra* is Aramaic in origin and is now used in Hebrew to mean a close-knit group of friends or society. The word *kadisha* (also from the Aramaic) roughly means sacred or holy. A “*Chevra Kadisha*” is, essentially, a Jewish sacred burial group.

Imagine the death of a random someone you once sat next to at services. Maybe you gave them a nod hello, sang *Hinei Ma Tov* with your arms wrapped around each other's shoulders - and that was it. Now imagine what happens when that person dies. Someone they know or our clergy calls the nonprofit Jewish funeral home to come pick that person up and start the process of arranging for that person's burial. But before they go into a casket, this person, once filled with life and joy, deserves one last moment of dignified kindness from folks who have chosen to be in community with them. SZ's dedicated *chevra kadisha* volunteers are trained in the *halachic* (Jewish legal)

principles guiding the burial process; with prayers and without judgment, they perform *tahara*, traditional rituals including cleaning and dressing, preparing this person for the next step and ensuring that every member of our community can depart this world embraced by love, compassion, and understanding - reaffirming that every life, no matter its journey, is sacred.

Many of us don't have biological families to take care of us during our most vulnerable moments - sadly, this is especially true for Queer folx both historically and now. I feel so lucky to have found this community, knowing that when my time comes to leave this beautiful earth, our holy burial society volunteers will know exactly what to do. To learn more about making your own plans that include *tahara* (or not), please be in touch with Rabbi Copeland, call one of the amazing Funeral Directors (Robert, Jaguar or Crae) at our local nonprofit Jewish funeral home and cemetery organization, Sinai Memorial Chapel, or watch for SZ workshops about advance planning.

Read the JGF Online!

The JGF can be found online.

Read current and previous issues at:

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Sheila Glass

cousin of Ami Zusman

Judy Marchick

aunt of Lisa Finkelstein

Kevin Fisher-Paulson

friend of Larry Best and our community

OCTOBER

Thomas Pressman

friend of Kay Magilavy

Marsha Berger

friend of Allan Gold

SHA'AR ZAHAV / MAZEL TOV

Got something to celebrate? Send your Mazel Tov Announcements to office@shaarzahav.org to be included in future newsletters.

SEPTEMBER

Emily Ornelas-Dorian and Carolina Ornelas-Dorian

Jan Half and Sharyn Saslafsky

Arthur Slepian and Gerry Llamado

Lisa Finkelstein and Sarah Grams

Daniel Loftus and Christopher Nguyen

Marty Rawlings-Fein and Shelli Rawlings-Fein

on renewing their vows at our Proposition 3 Campaign Kickoff

Nancy Levin

On her first drash

Ellie Rose Maas and Jim Chowdry

On their wedding

OCTOBER

Tamar Gershon

on her retirement

NOVEMBER

Michael O'Rourke and Geoff Cooper

on the blessing for their baby Maxine

SHA'AR ZAHAV / YAHRZEITS

DECEMBER

Clark Beebe

Allan Craig

David Glassberg

Midred Goldstein

William David Holt II

Norman David Kramer

Elijah Michael Silverrod MacLachlan

George Mintzer

Milton Murland

Marilyn O'Keeffe

Walter Palmer

Nicholas Papadopoulos

Sol Segal

Frieda Shaber

Jerry Sharlin

Kathy (Pixie) Swanz

JANUARY

George Ash

Bill Ashley-Dobbin

Robert Baldock

Ben Blachman

Jerome Davis

Keith Fenton

William Goldstein

Jose Hernandez

Arthur Judelsohn

Phyllis Mintzer

Aaron Nacamulli

Eugene I. Pearl

Martha R. Pearl

Gerald (Jerry) Rosenstein

Soraya Vorster

FEBRUARY

John Atteridg

Tauby Auerback

Paul Cohen

Ziggy Gimnich

Allen Harris

Zadie Heart

Mordechai Kashtan

Hyman Margolis

Israel Miranski

Cheryl Orvis

Steven Richter

Ada Rosenbaum

Barbara Rosenblum

Ephraim Troy

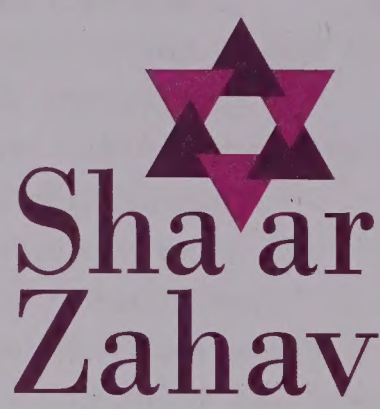
Leland Vogel

Stephen Walters

Nathan Eli Weinstein

Ronald Wilmot

Advertise in the JGF!



Let the Sha'ar Zahav community
and all our friends know about
your business or services!

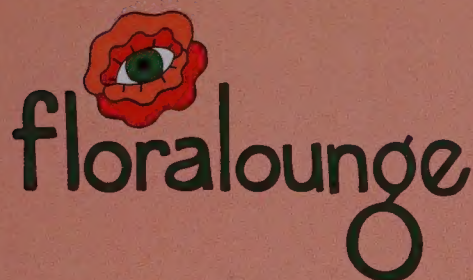
Contact: office@shaarzahav.org

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Please note: Advertising deadline for our next issue is Jan. 20th!



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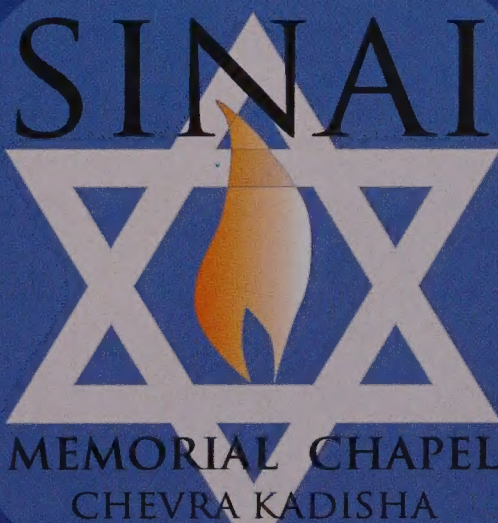


Jim Frazin, CFP®, AIF®

415.337.4566 x 101

jim@CommunitasFinancial.com

Jim Frazin, is an Investment Advisory Representative of Communitas Financial Planning Inc, an independent investment advisory firm registered in California. *No product sales. 8/9/12



Sinai is a century old nonprofit funeral home and cemetery organization. We provide death care services to all Jewish people and their loved ones. As a charitable institution, we honor Jewish traditions while embracing evolving Jewish practices, respect the dignity and the choices of the deceased and their families, and provide compassionate support for the living. Sinai serves all cemeteries - locally and globally.

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Thank you for advertising!

Your contributions help us realize our commitment to building and maintaining a vibrant, living community for Sha'ar Zahav. With your financial support, we continue to prosper, grow, and celebrate our future.

Congregation

Sha'ar Zahav

290 Dolores Street
San Francisco CA 94103

Voice 415 861 6932

Web www.shaarzahav.org

Rabbi Mychal Copeland
Cantor Sharon Bernstein

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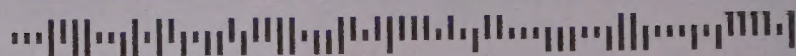
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Celebrate a Month of Chanukah Joy with Sha'ar Zahav!



Gary Glaser, Shirley Lieberman and Phil Charney
sample the latkes, Sha'ar Zahav Chanukah party, 1990.
Photo by Michael Bettinger.

Dec. 6, Klezmer Shabbat

Dec. 16, Menorah Lighting in the Castro

Dec. 21, BSPM Chanukah Celebration

Dec. 25 - Jan. 1, Nightly Zoom Candlelightings

Dec. 27, Special Chanukah Zoom Shabbat

*Do you have digital photographs or video of Sha'ar Zahav activities or events?
The Archives Project, documenting our history, would like to have copies. Contact Lawrence Helman
(heytheresells@gmail.com) or Robert Tat (rob@roberttat.com)*